

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A system for accessing the content of various types of media files using a single interface, comprising:

5 a client receiver for receiving remote data from a remote device, where the remote data includes remote program modules and remote media format access data that corresponds to a set of remote media formats;

a client storage unit for storing client data, the client data further comprising:

a roster of client media formats that are accessible by the system;

10 a set of client media format access data; and

a set of client program modules;

wherein received remote media format access data is stored as client media format access data, and received remote program modules are stored as client program modules;

15 a client transmitter for transmitting client data to the remote device, wherein client data sent by the transmitter to the remote device includes status information that indicates the status of the client data; and

a client processor for executing any of the set of client program modules and for using the client media format access data to access the content of media files.

20 2. The system of claim 1, wherein the client receiver is for receiving remote data from a remote device when the system encounters a media file that has a media format that is not present in the roster of client media formats, and where the

remote data includes remote media format access data that enables the system to access the content of the encountered media file.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein client data transmitted to the remote device includes identifying data and billing information.

5 4. The system of claim 1, further comprising:
a decrypter for decrypting the remote data; and
an encrypter for encrypting the client data prior to transferring the client data to the remote device.

5. The system of claim 1, further comprising a client media format
10 controller for updating the set of client media access data by adding remote media format access data received from the remote device, for replacing client media format access data with corresponding remote media format access data received from the remote device and for deleting client media format access data.

6. The system of claim 1, further comprising a client program module
15 controller for updating the set of client program modules by adding remote program modules received from the remote device, for replacing client program modules with corresponding remote program modules received from the remote device, and for deleting client program modules.

7. The system of claim 5, wherein the client media format controller updates the set of client media formats and associated client media format access data upon receiving an inquiry from the remote device.

8. The system of claim 6, wherein the client program module controller updates the set of client program modules upon receiving an inquiry from the remote device.

9. The system of claim 1, further comprising a network interface for interfacing with the Internet.

10. The system of claim 1, further comprising a graphical user interface (GUI), the GUI further comprising:

- means for selecting media files to be accessed by the system;
- means for controlling the appearance of the GUI, wherein the GUI is customizable such that a user can determine how the GUI is displayed; and
- means for controlling the functionality of the GUI, wherein the GUI is customizable such that a user can determine the frequency and manner of data transfers to and from the remote server;

wherein user customizations are stored in the client storage unit as personalization data.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the processor accesses the content of media files according the stored personalization data.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the GUI displays a roster of the set of client media formats in a user-readable format.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the roster includes the status of the client data.

5 14. The system of claim 10, wherein the GUI further comprises a graphic equalizer.

15. The system of claim 10, wherein the GUI further comprises a viewing area.

10 16. The system of claim 10, wherein the client transmitter transmits the stored personalization data to the remote device and the remote device stores the personalization data in a remote storage unit.

17. The system of claim 5, wherein the client media format controller replaces client media format access data when corresponding remote media format access data is received from the remote device.

15 18. The system of claim 17, wherein the client media format controller replaces client media format access data if the corresponding remote media format access data is a newer version.

20 19. The system of claim 17, wherein the client media format controller replaces client media format access data if the client media format access data is damaged.

20. The system of claim 6, wherein the client program module controller replaces a client program module according the personalization data.

21. The system of claim 6, wherein the client program module controller replaces a client program module when a corresponding remote program module is
5 received from the remote device.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the client program module controller replaces a client program module if the corresponding remote program module is a newer version.

23. The system of claim 21, wherein the client program module controller
10 replaces a client program module if the client program module is damaged.

24. A system for maintaining and distributing media formats, comprising:
a remote media format controller for compiling remote media format access data usable for accessing the content of a set of remote media formats, and for updating the remote media format access data;

15 a remote program module controller for compiling and updating a set of remote program modules;

a remote storage unit for storing the remote media format access data and the set of remote program modules;

a remote encrypter for encrypting the remote media format access data and the
20 remote program modules; and

a remote transmitter for transmitting remote media format access data and remote program modules to at least one client device that is connected the communications network;

wherein the set of remote media formats includes all commercially available
5 media formats.

25. The system of claim 24, further comprising:

a remote receiver for receiving client data from the client device; and
a remote decrypter for decrypting the client data.

26. The remote server of claim 25, wherein the remote receiver is for
10 uploading billing and user identification data from the client device.

27. The remote server of claim 25, wherein the remote receiver is for
uploading data indicating the status of client media format access data stored on the
client device and wherein the remote transmitter is for downloading the remote media
format access data to the client device according to the uploaded status data.

15 28. The remote server of claim 25, wherein the remote receiver is for
uploading data indicating the status of client program modules stored on the client
device and wherein the remote transmitter is for downloading the remote program
modules to the client device according to the uploaded status data.

29. The remote server of claim 25, wherein the remote receiver is for
20 uploading user personalization data, and the remote transmitter is for downloading

remote media format access data and remote program modules according the user personalization data.

30. The remote server of claim 29, wherein the personalization data further controls the frequency and manner of downloading and storage of the remote program modules, and the personalization data controls the links to the media files.

31. The remote server of claim 30, wherein the remote storage unit further functions to store the personalization data.

32. A method of displaying content of media files, comprising:
storing a set of client program modules and a set of client media format access data on a client device;
connecting the client device to a communications network;
comparing the set of client media format access data to a set of remote media format access data;
downloading members of a set of remote media format access data in response to the media format comparison;
storing the members of the set of remote media format access data in the set of client media format access data on the client device; and
accessing the content of the media files using the client media format access data.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising:

comparing a set of client program modules to a set of remote program
modules;

downloading members of a set of remote program modules in response to the
program module comparison; and

5 storing the members of the set of remote program modules in the set of client
program modules on the client device.

34. The method of claim 32, further comprising decrypting the members of
the set of remote media format access data.

35. The method of claim 32, further comprising decrypting the members of
10 the set of remote program modules.

36. The method of claim 32, further comprising implementing
customizations to the appearance and functionality of a graphical user interface (GUI)
and storing the customizations as personalization data.

37. The method of claim 36, further comprising transmitting the
15 personalization data to a remote device.

38. The method of claim 36, further comprising downloading members of
the set of remote media format access data according to the personalization data.

39. The method of claim 32, further comprising:
implementing customizations to the appearance and functionality of the GUI
20 and storing the customizations as personalization data; and

downloading members of the set of remote program modules according to the personalization data.

40. The method of claim 32, further comprising transmitting data to a remote device.

5 41. The method of claim 32, further comprising transmitting billing and identifying data to the remote device.

42. The method of claim 40, wherein transmitting data further comprises encrypting the data.

43. The method of claim 32, wherein storing the members of the set of
10 remote media format access data further comprises deleting corresponding members of the set of client media format access data previously stored on the client device.

44. The method of claim 33, wherein storing the members of the set of remote program modules further comprises deleting corresponding members of the set of client program modules previously stored on the client device.

15 45. A method of maintaining and distributing media format access data, comprising:

compiling a set of remote media format access data that is usable to access the content of any commercially available media format;

storing the set of remote media format access data on a remote server;

storing additional media format access data in the set of remote media formats
by obtaining the additional media format access data; and
downloading media format access data to a client device.

46. The method of claim 45, wherein obtaining the additional media format
5 access data further comprises retrieving media format access data that have no
corresponding members in the set of remote media format access data.

47. The method of claim 45, wherein obtaining the additional media format
access data further comprises retrieving media format access data that are newer than
the corresponding members of the set of remote media format access data.

48. The method of claim 45, further comprising uploading status data from
10 the client device, where the status data indicates the status of a set of client media
format access data, and wherein downloading data to the client device further
comprises downloading data to the client device according the status data.

49. The method of claim 45, wherein downloading data comprises
15 transmitting the data over the Internet.

50. The method of claim 45, further comprising uploading billing and
identifying data from the client device.

51. The method of claim 45, wherein uploading status data further
comprises uploading a result of a comparison of the set of remote media format
20 access data to the set of client media format access data.

52. The method of claim 45, further comprising:
compiling a set of remote program modules;
storing the set of remote program modules on the remote server; and
storing additional remote program modules the remote server by adding
5 program modules that have no corresponding members in the set of remote program
modules;
downloading program modules from the set of remote program modules to the
client device according the status data;
wherein the status data further indicates the status of a set of client program
10 modules.

53. The method of claim 52, wherein the status data further includes user
personalization data.

54. The method of claim 52, further comprising encrypting data
downloaded from the remote server.

15 55. The method of claim 52, further comprising decrypting data uploaded
to the remote server.

56. The method of claim 45, wherein downloading data to the client device
is initiated by the remote server.

57. The method of claim 45, wherein downloading data to the client device
20 is initiated by the client device.

58. A machine readable medium having stored thereon executable code which causes a machine to perform a method of displaying content of media files, the method comprising:

- storing a set of client program modules and a set of client media format access data on a client device;
- connecting the client device to a communications network;
- comparing the set of client media format access data to a set of remote media format access data;
- downloading members of a set of remote media format access data in response to the media format comparison;
- storing the members of the set of remote media format access data in the set of client media format access data on the client device; and
- accessing the content of the media files using the client media format access data.

59. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises:

- comparing a set of client program modules to a set of remote program modules;
- downloading members of a set of remote program modules in response to the program module comparison; and
- storing the members of the set of remote program modules in the set of client program modules on the client device.

60. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises decrypting the members of the set of remote media format access data.

61. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises decrypting the members of the set of remote program modules.

5 62. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises implementing customizations to the appearance and functionality of a graphical user interface (GUI) and storing the customizations as personalization data.

63. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises transmitting the personalization data to a remote device.

10 64. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises downloading members of the set of remote media format access data according to the personalization data.

65. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises:

15 implementing customizations to the appearance and functionality of the GUI and storing the customizations as personalization data; and

downloading members of the set of remote program modules according to the personalization data.

20 66. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises transmitting data to the remote device.

67. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the method further comprises transmitting billing and identifying data to the remote device.

68. The machine readable medium of claim 66, wherein transmitting data further comprises encrypting the data.

5 69. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein storing the members of the set of remote media format access data further comprises deleting corresponding members of the set of client media format access data previously stored on the client device; and wherein storing the members of the set of remote program modules further comprises deleting corresponding members of the set of
10 client program modules previously stored on the client device.

70. A machine readable medium having stored thereon executable code which causes a machine to perform a method for maintaining and distributing media format access data, the method comprising:

compiling a set of remote media format access data that is usable to access the
15 content of any commercially available media format;

storing the set of remote media format access data on a remote server;

storing additional media format access data in the set of remote media formats by obtaining the additional media format access data; and

downloading media format access data to a client device.

20 71. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein obtaining the additional media format access data further comprises retrieving media format access

data that have no corresponding members in the set of remote media format access data.

72. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein obtaining the additional media format access data further comprises retrieving media format access data that are newer than the corresponding members of the set of remote media format access data.

73. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein the method further comprises uploading status data from the client device, where the status data indicates the status of a set of client media format access data, and wherein downloading data to the client device further comprises downloading data to the client device according to the status data.

74. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein downloading data comprises transmitting the data over the Internet.

75. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein the method further comprises uploading billing and identifying data from the client device.

76. The machine readable medium of claim 73, wherein uploading status data further comprises uploading a result of a comparison of the set of remote media format access data to the set of client media format access data.

77. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein the method further comprises:

compiling a set of remote program modules;
storing the set of remote program modules on the remote server; and
storing additional remote program modules the remote server by adding
program modules that have no corresponding members in the set of remote program
5 modules;

downloading program modules from the set of remote program modules to the
client device according the status data;

wherein the status data further indicates the status of a set of client program
modules.

10 78. The machine readable medium of claim 77, wherein the status data
further includes user personalization data.

79. The machine readable medium of claim 77, wherein the method further
comprises encrypting data downloaded from the remote server.

80. The machine readable medium of claim 77, wherein the method further
15 comprises decrypting data uploaded to the remote server.

81. The machine readable medium of claim 70, wherein downloading data
to the client device is initiated by the remote server.

82. The machine readable medium of claim 69, wherein downloading data
to the client device is initiated by the client device.

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